



# Co-operative Councils

## Innovation Network

## POVERTY



## Oldham Council

### Responding to the Cost of Living Crisis

On 27<sup>th</sup> July 2022, the Council hosted a Cost of Living Crisis Summit which brought together a range of partners, residents, senior officers, Elected Members and frontline staff, to focus on actions that could be taken quickly to maximise support for residents through the winter.

Members of Oldham's Poverty Truth Commission and Youth Council worked within smaller groups to explore how resources could be best aligned to address five key priorities: food; energy and fuel; income maximisation, advice and support; housing and childcare costs. Based upon feedback from this session, an action plan was developed which was considered and approved by the Council and Oldham's Partnership Board in October 2022, along with the allocation of £3m from Council reserves to fund its implementation.

Given the urgency to ensure the support was available before the winter, many of the actions built upon current initiatives, including for example extending the Council's Warm Homes and Local Welfare Assistance Schemes. Other actions, such as the funding of additional staff within Citizen's Advice and the Council's Support and Inclusion Team; the creation of Warm Banks and the community engagement teams continue to inform and accelerate the move towards the place-based integration of services in the longer term.

A Cost of Living Working Group was established and continues to meet, to provide cross-departmental and inter-organisational oversight and ensure delivery of the action plan. Reflecting clear and urgent political priorities, the group is chaired by the Council's Assistant

Chief Executive and comprises service managers and key officers from across the public service system. The group includes service leads from Welfare Rights, Revenues and Benefits, Customer Experience, Housing, Place-Based Integration, Finance, Communications and the VCFSE sector. Given the tight timescales and the need to react quickly to the unfolding crisis, the group meets weekly to update on progress, remove barriers to implementation, share learning and identify and address emerging issues.



Council Leader Amanda Chadderton joins one of the Community Engagement Teams to provide advice and support to residents on the doorstep

From the outset, the various workstreams and support offer within the Action Plan have been closely aligned with marketing and communications from the Council and key partners such as Action Together, Oldham's VCSFE umbrella organisation. We Can Help, the Council's overarching cost of living campaign, has ensured a co-ordinated approach to and promotion of support for both residents and staff. This has included the We Can Help Helpline - one number for residents to call to access a wide range of advice and support; the publication and distribution of the We Can Help brochure to every household in Oldham, promotion of the Money Advice Referral Tool (MART) developed in partnership with Greater Manchester Poverty Action, and the associated development of face to face training with frontline and back office staff across Council Services and partner organisations. This was accompanied by bitesize online training sessions for the MART that staff could access via the Council's online learning platform and the promotion of different support services via Action Together's online Wednesday Weeklies.

The need to move quickly to deliver the Action Plan accelerated the development of a data and intelligence tool to enable its impact monitoring and measurement. A Cost of Living Dashboard was created to track progress against the actions, using a range of indicators directly relating to each of the workstreams. These indicators included for example: the number of warm homes payments made; food parcels issued; number and nature of calls to the We Can Help helpline, Support and Inclusion Team and the Council's Contact Centre;

issues emerging from the doorstep in conversations with our community engagement teams and number of households in temporary accommodation. The dashboard is now a standing item on the weekly Working Group meetings at which progress, impact and changes in service demand are tracked. This informs and enables an early system-wide response to flex the resources available; supporting those parts of the system under most pressure.



Councillor Amanda Chadderton, Leader of the Council joins colleagues on the Council's dedicated We Can Help helpline

The Action Plan and associated funding come to an end at the end of March, however certain aspects of the plan will continue for another year for example, the community engagement teams and additional staffing for Citizens Advice and Welfare Rights services.

With this in mind, the Cost of Living Working Group is beginning to explore how the Council and its partners meet the significant ongoing challenge of supporting residents with the rising cost of living in the medium to longer term. To this end, the learning from the Cost of Living response is being used to inform broader system thinking in the move from crisis response to early intervention and prevention. Tackling poverty and disadvantage at a place-based level is key; together with the creation of an anti-poverty strategy that builds upon learning from our cost of living response, the findings of Oldham's Poverty Truth Commission and the borough's previous anti-poverty action plan.

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**For further information contact:**

Amanda Richardson

Policy Manager, Oldham Council

[amanda.richardson@oldham.gov.uk](mailto:amanda.richardson@oldham.gov.uk) | [www.oldham.gov.uk](http://www.oldham.gov.uk)